

MEMO

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## Star Bright, Star Tonight

For years, the Washington Evening Star had been running a poor second to the Washington Post. Content to appeal to the city's upper-crust "cave dwellers" but to few others, the Star came nowhere near matching the Post's broad coverage. This lack showed up in circulation as well as advertising. The once bright Star was fast fading.

The three families that have owned the paper since 1867—the Noyeses, the Kauffmanns, the Adamsons—put their heads together and decided to do something about it. In 1963, Newbold Noyes was named editor, with a mandate to spend money on a topnotch staff. As a result, today's Star is again a newspaper worth reading, without sacrificing its urbane, low-keyed style. It manages to keep up with fast-breaking news and avoid the big, overblown headlines and shoddy sensationalism too often endemic to the afternoon. The Star is still the No. 2 paper in Washington, but in almost any other city it would rank as No. 1.

**Encouraging Eccentricity.** Top jobs at the Star are filled by Noyeses and Kauffmanns, but on the reporter level there are plenty of promising newcomers. Haynes Johnson has a knack for conveying the nuances of national mood; after a swing around the U.S. last November, when polls showed presidential popularity low and dropping, he concluded that there was unrest and yearning for strong leadership but also an undercurrent of sympathy for the President. Smith Hempstone covered the Middle East war with lyrical intensity, highlighting particularly the plight of the Arab victims. Political Writer Paul Hope showed a keen eye for detail as he followed George Romney around New Hampshire and found some surprising pockets of support for the governor.

Reporters are encouraged to express their personal opinions. Hope, for example, wrote a column last week suggesting that Romney may not be quite the bumbler the press makes him out to be. "One might ask," he wrote, "whether Governor Nelson Rockefeller is a simpleton because he winks and says

'Hi ya, fella' to the hundreds he shakes hands with on a fast neighborhood tour. And how about President Johnson's hand flutter to airport crowds and his 'Y'all come see me'?"

The Star's laissez-faire attitude toward reporters has its drawbacks. "We're a hothouse for eccentrics," says Columnist Mary McGrory, one of the paper's most engaging eccentrics, with a well-used pipeline to the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party. But this same freedom keeps staffers loyal to their paper. Though some are lured away by higher salaries elsewhere, many stay. They know they will be backed up in whatever they say. Despite the fact that the Star's top management thought all the criticism of the CIA last year was damaging to the national interest, Assistant Managing Editor Charles Scib continued to run Reporter Robert Walters' exposés of covert CIA activities—probably the most extensive documentation to appear in any U.S. paper.

**Less Than Everything.** Politically, the Star continues to be reasonably conservative without the doctrinaire tone it once had. It fully supports racial integration, though it has angered some local Negroes by opposing Washington home rule. Its grounds, of course, are not racial but the fear that with home rule Congress would not appropriate sufficient funds for its share of the city's government. The Star generally backs the President on Viet Nam but, as Foreign Editor Crosby Noyes puts it, "we're not for automatic and unending escalation."

With its smaller staff, the Star has no intention of rivaling the Post's more comprehensive coverage at home and abroad. Its planning for the coming presidential campaign is characteristic. "The Post," says Newbold Noyes, "will try to do everything. But that requires no judgment. We want to decide what

is important and cover those aspects well." This quiet, well-mannered approach to the news has been gaining readers: the Star's circulation has risen 51,078, to 309,245, in the past five years. In the same period, the Post's circulation increased 58,804, to 467,505. From time to time, the Star has held tentative merger talks with the other Washington afternoon paper, the sprightly Scripps-Howard News. But chances of such a union are dim now that the Star is well on its way to creating an authentic personality of its own.



NEWBOLD NOYES

*Doing the important, and doing it well.*

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